



Nicotine... **A Combat Drag**

By MSG Williard K. Brown, Jr.

We roll it, dip it, sniff it, chew it and smoke it. Many years ago it was part of our field ration issue. But times, they are a changin' and so are the ways the Army deals with tobacco use.

Some people smoke because they think it will enhance their stature in life, make them appear more important or fashionable. Others use tobacco as a crutch to overcome self-consciousness, particularly in social situations. Teens often light up because their friends do and they want to be accepted by the group.

Then there are the "chewers" or "dippers" who often choose this means of tobacco use over smoking to curb their nicotine cravings while engaged in a sport or some other activity that's inconvenient for puffing on a cigarette.

Medical evidence has been in for years on the use of tobacco and its link to cancer, heart disease, stroke and lung disease. Tobacco smoke and juices contain carcinogens, chemicals that can cause normal cells in the body to change into cancer cells.

Smokers not only put themselves at risk, but also others nearby who breathe in the secondary smoke. If you live with a tobacco user you've probably come across a few other unpleasantities such as halitosis as well as "housecatosis."

Then there's the individual user's susceptibility to constricted blood vessels, increased blood pressure and heart rate, tar in the lungs, gum disease, discoloration of teeth and tooth decay, and decreased resistance of nose, sinuses and lungs to infection.

Smoking is the cause of some 30 percent of all cancers and 75 percent of lung cancer. Lung cancer is already the leading cause of death for men and has just surpassed breast cancer as the leading cause of death for women. There is a direct link between the use of cigarettes, pipes, cigars and chewing tobacco and cancer of the mouth, lips, tongue and throat.

Smokeless tobacco has higher concentrations of the cancer-causing chemicals than cigarette tobacco (and many really "pack it in" between the cheek and gum). One can of snuff delivers as much nicotine as 60 cigarettes. One pinch is equal to two cigarettes. This also makes it harder to "break the habit," because users are actually mainlining the chemicals.

Nicotine is a very addictive drug. In trying to break the habit, users go through physical and psychological drug withdrawal effects. The user not only has to overcome the drug addiction, but also has to overcome the habit. That's why most users who want to quit can't do it on their own.

The Army has put forth a great effort

to educate our soldiers on tobacco use. Some policies, such as no smoking in government buildings, often discourage the smoker and may be the catalyst to kicking the habit.

A good unit education and reinforcement program will help tobacco users to kick the habit. Health Risk Assessments are a good tool to identify tobacco users and educate them about the risks. Units can display anti-tobacco posters in common areas and work places and conduct command information classes on the hazards of tobacco use.

Unit-sponsored cessation classes and support groups should include family members. Cessation classes provide helpful ideas for quitting and how to change daily habits that tend to encourage tobacco use. Nicotine patches may be prescribed as an aid to kick the habit.

Surveys conducted at the end of the cessation programs and one year later, as a follow-up, will help in measuring program success.

The battalion medic and community health nurse stand ready to assist units. The American Cancer Society's toll free number (1-800-4-CANCER) answers individual's questions. Various health organizations and agencies also provide publications upon request.

Readiness is our responsibility as NCOs and soldiers. Army Regulation 600-63, **Army Health Promotion Program**, Chapter 4-1, states: "Smoking tobacco harms readiness by impairing physical fitness and by increasing illness, absenteeism, premature death and health care costs. Readiness will be enhanced by establishing the standard of a smoke-free environment that supports abstinence from and discourages use of tobacco."

The "Marlboro Man" is dead, a cancer victim. Don't you or your soldiers ride the same horse he rode. It's healthier, and cheaper, to be free from the combat drag of tobacco use. ■

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